

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)
SUBJECT: BRIEFING BOOK FOR SECRETARY'S VISIT: JAPANESE INTERNAL
POLITICAL SITUATION

1. IN THE JULY UPPER HOUSE ELECTION, CONTRARY TO EXPECTATIONS, THE RULING CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (LDP), RETAINED ITS SLIM UPPER HOUSE MAJORITY WITH THE HELP OF CONSERVATIVE INDEPENDENTS. THE SMALLER, MODERATE CENTRIST PARTIES CHALKED UP MODEST GAINS, WHILE THE LEFTIST JAPAN SOCIALIST PARTY (JSP) AND JAPAN COMMUNIST PARTY (JCP) SUFFERED SHARP SETBACKS. LONGER-TERM ELECTION TRENDS REMAIN MURKY, BUT THERE IS SOME FEELING IN ALL PARTIES THAT THE UPPER HOUSE ELECTION RESULTS AUGER WELL FOR THE LDP IN THE NEXT LOWER HOUSE ELECTION. (THE LDP NOW HOLDS 166 OF 252 UPPER HOUSE SEATS AND 159 OF 511 LOWER HOUSE SEATS.)

2. THE LDP'S BETTER-THAN-EXPECTED SHOWING HAS STRENGTHENED PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA'S POSITION AND RELATIVE PEACE IN THE PARTY, LIKELY TO LAST SEVERAL MONTHS, SHOULD PREVAIL AT THE TIME OF YOUR VISIT. FUKUDA'S WOULD-BE CRITICS WITHIN THE LDP, FOREMOST OF WHOM IS FORMER PRIME MINISTER MIKI, HAVE BEEN SILENCED BY THE ELECTION OUTCOME, AND INTERMITTENT TALK OF A POSSIBLE LDP SPLIT

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IS NO LONGER HEARD. A CABINET SHUFFLE IS UNLIKELY BEFORE LATE FALL; A GENERAL ELECTION WOULD COME NEXT SPRING AT THE EARLIEST. WITH THESE WORRIES OUT OF THE WAY, FUKUDA IS NOW ABLE TO CONCENTRATE HIS ATTENTION ON BUSINESS RECOVERY AT HOME AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

3. THE SCHEDULED DIET SESSION IN SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

PROMISES TO BE RELATIVELY UNEVENTFUL. OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE ON THE DEFENSIVE, THE SECOND-RANKING SOCIALIST PARTY IS IN THE PROCESS OF LEADERSHIP CHANGE, AND THERE ARE EVEN RUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT AMONG THE COMMUNISTS. THUS, WHILE THE LDP MUST CONTINUE TO COOPERATE AND COMPROMISE WITH OPPOSITION PARTIES, ITS RETENTION OF AN UPPER HOUSE MAJORITY MAKES DIET MANAGEMENT FAR EASIER THAN IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

4. ALTHOUGH GIVEN A BREATHING SPACE, THE LDP STILL MUST COPE WITH A VARIETY OF DIFFICULT ISSUES. THE NATIONAL MOOD IS ONE OF VAGUE UNEASE: INTERNALLY, LAGGING BUSINESS RECOVERY AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, INFLATION DEMAND, IF NOT SOLUTIONS, AT LEAST EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS. EXTERNALLY, THE JAPANESE FEEL THEMSELVES CONFRONTED BY EVEN MORE THAN THE NORMAL QUOTA OF DIFFICULTIES: SHARP CURTAILMENTS OF TRADITIONAL FISHING RIGHTS, MOUNTING CRITICISM OF EXCESSIVE JAPANESE EXPORTS AND OF JAPAN'S ROLE IN THE WORLD ECONOMY GENERALLY, POSSIBILITIES OF INSTABILITY ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA, AND MOST IMPORTANT, CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY ABOUT LONG-TERM ENERGY SUPPLIES (REFLECTED IN THE INTENSITY OF JAPANESE REACTION TO THE NEW U.S. NUCLEAR POLICY). IN ALL THESE AREAS, THERE ARE FEW DIFFERENCES AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES -- RATHER, THERE IS COMPETITION AMONG THEM TO REPRESENT JAPAN'S POSITION MOST FORCEFULLY. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, CONFIDENTIAL

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PERCEIVED CONSERVATIVE FAILURE TO DEFEND JAPAN'S INTERESTS VIGOROUSLY IS PERHAPS THE MOST SERIOUS POTENTIAL SOURCE OF DIFFICULTY FOR FUKUDA AND HIS PARTY. MANSFIELD

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